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ABSTRACT

There is a need for applying the requirements of simplicity to education for deaf students. Application of the rule of simplicity, (which states that if an activity, assessment tool, or theory complicates, rather than illuminates, abandon it). requires organization and the absence of unnecessary educational clutter. Changes in teacher behavior and organization and applications of the rule of simplicity to curriculum development (including the use of the planning web), classroom management (including specification of desirable classroom conditions, the analysis of existing classroom conditions, and the assessment of managerial effectiveness), and language development. (CL)

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"The Role of Simplicity in Deaf Education"

Alexander Graham Bell Association
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"More matter with less art.... Queen Gertrude to Polonious, Hamlet, Act I.

All too often what is learned in college classrooms about theory and methodology is regarded by the practicing educator as absolutely worthless. This is particularly lamentable when one realizes that theories about children's learning behavior, the development of curriculum materials, and classroom management should provide the philosophical bases for any educational practice in the classroom. In deaf education also the focus should be on the translation of theoretical constructs into pragmatic classroom approaches. Yet in teacher education programs, theory is rarely explained in terms which uncomplicate rather than obfuscate. Consequently, teachers find it difficult to apply their knowledge of such theories to improve instruction. By its very nature, a theory remains an educated hypothesis until it has demonstrated it works in practice. While teachers may memorize a theory to fulfill academic requirements, such a theory will be quickly abandoned in practice if considered useless. This has proven to be the case even when the value of the theory is unquestioned.

Practicing educators, then fail to realize the benefits of some theoretical paradigms because of these perceptions.

Clearly, this is unfortunate, when one considers the number of classroom strategies related to and representative of educational theories in various disciplines. For this reason educators must beware of abandoning the "theoretical baby" with the bath water. In some way, practitioners and students of classroom teaching must learn how best to make theory an ally rather than an adversary.

Theory to Practice - pragmatic applications of theoretical esoterica - what a heady thing to contemplate! Is it possible? Is it feasible? Can it be done? The answer an unqualified, qualified.... **Yes**!

Yes, if certain ground rules are observed. Yes, if teacher educators and practitioners are willing to let go of some of their cherished biases against theories. Yes, if those in the field of education and deaf education are willing to re-direct their energies and re-structure their thinking. In short, to make use of theory, we must be willing to engage in logical, though not necessarily complicated, thinking.

The Rule of Simplicity:

Centuries ago Socrates stated that the beginning of wisdom is a recognition of one's own ignorance. In deaf education and in the field of education generally, we have been too quick to embrace the newest "fad" or the most "glittery" educational gadgetry. People have taught and will continue to teach without many of these "advancements" and the strategies/techniques which endure are those with

proven reliability. In our profession, such reliability is based on results. Simply, the "thing", activity, strategy, theory works.

Remember this as we examine what I call "the rule of simplicity."

The rule states:

> "If an activity, assessment tool, or theory complicates rather than 'illuminates', abandon it."

When applied, the rule requires a careful examination of the activity, assessment tool, or theory.

1) What does, it mean? First can it be explained and does it explain a real classroom problem? Few teachers are educational theorists. It is unlikely you can explain something you do not fully understand. In a way we are the ones who determine if a theory has validity by implementing it in the classroom. Obviously, w cannot do this effectively if we are incapable of explaining the theory ourselves.
2) What is it supposed to explain, measure, or remediate?
3) Can it be implemented in the classroom?
   Does it require more in-service than it is worth? Once learned and practiced, will there be tangible results, not necessarily "big" results, just explanable, definite, no pretend, let's play fair with students and ourselves, results.

4) Can it be evaluated?

In other words, if the theory fixes something, how will we know it's been fixed?

If the problem is not readily fixed, can remediation strategies be easily prepared? You cannot evaluate the nebulous, the esoteric, the ethereal.

As teachers, we are accountable for pupil progress. Whether we agree with this notion at a philosophical level we are forced to acknowledge it at the classroom level.

[Disappointed? Did you come expecting great new truths to be revealed?]

Not profound truths, nor, I suspect, particularly new ones. Yet are not some of our most beautiful truths, in life and in teaching the most uncluttered?

Application of the rule requires organization and the absence of unnecessary educational clutter. It requires first a change in teacher behavior.

Teacher Behavior and The Rule of Simplicity

More than we realize, instructional effectiveness is very much a product of teacher behavior. If teacher activity is fragmented and disorganized so will classroom instruction. Getting and remaining organized is a important professional skill. One simple tool, I have found for accomplishing this is Lakein's system of time management.

In his book, How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life, Alan Lakein outlines specific strategies for use in organizing yourself and your time. Let's review a few of these which are applicable to teachers:

I) Analyze how your time is used:

Strategy: Keep a log of your time for one week.

a) list all the activities which you do and the approximate time each requires. Include phone calls, travel time, even time spent waiting.

b) At the end of the week, look at the results and do the following:

1) Circle those activities which take up the most time

2) Determine if these time-consuming activities can be shortened or improved in some way

3) Determine your "peak" working time whether you are more productive during the morning, afternoon, or evening hours.

On the basis of your analysis, try to eliminate those projects which waste your time. (We'll talk about how in a second.) You are now ready to plan your month:

Monthly Planning:

1) List all projects due for that month

2) Put the projects in order

a) List "A" priority items first

b) List "B" priority items next (those which must be completed in two weeks time)

3) Prioritize the list. Those projects due first, you list first

4) Sub-divide large projects into smaller bits (Swiss cheese principle because you are poking holes in a large project.)

Complete each piece until you have completed the project.

5) Using this monthly list make a daily agenda ("To Do" List). You may elect to make a weekly list and transfer items to a daily list). This is your decision.

a) Always put "A" items first

b) B items next

c) C items are "fillers"
(Examples: telephone calls, grocery lists, personal correspondence not related to "A" priority items etc.)

You complete "C" items after you have completed A and B items.

Implementation of "To Do" List

1) Do the "A" items during your peak times. This is when you have the most energy and are likely to be productive.

2) Keep the "To Do" list manageable, the idea is to accomplish items not impress yourself or others with the quantity of those items.

3) As much as possible, avoid those activities which waste your time. To help, Lakein suggests the following strategies:

1) Handle each piece of paper only once. Either deal with it or chuck it.

2) Subscribe only to those periodicals you know you will read.

3) Learn to say "no" and mean it to projects which overextend you.

4) Curtail long telephone conversations and remain on "hold" for no more than 45 seconds. Hang up and call again.

5) When forced to wait (in an administrator's office, dentist/doctor's office) utilize the time by bringing a "Tickler File" with you.

This file contains books or articles you want to read, correspondence you need to complete, or "pieces" of large projects which can be worked on.

Instead of thumbing through the magazine or staring at walls, make use of these "gifts of time."

6) Avoid procrastination - Do it now!

7) To help keep you "on task", Lakein suggests you ask yourself this question.

What is the best use of my time now?

8) Don't become a "slave to time". Occasionally plans will not work out exactly as you had wanted them to. Make adjustments and don't spend time worrying or feeling defeated.

Remember no time management plan will work unless you want it to and are committed to it.

Time management is a skill and one not developed over night. However, once you have adopted or evolved a system with which you are comfortable, you will find yourself developing the habit of wise time usage. Time management, then is one prerequisite for applying the rule of simplicity. Lakein's theory of time management is one which translates well into practice in the classroom and in personal and professional endeavors.

Curriculum Development:

In planning curriculum, regardless of the discipline or subject matter, there are two cardinal rules:

1) Identify early the goals you wish to accomplish in each area
2) Organize goals and, the objectives which will be used to meet them, in a systematic fashion.

Violations of the Rule of Simplicity in Curriculum Planning:

Too often the theories we adopt for curriculum planning are not systematically applied. Though many of us have studied several curriculum theories, have learned how to write goals and objectives, and have compieted instructional media courses, somehow we have not always found ways to organize these elements and integrate content. Because we have been unsure about our own instructional directions, we have tended to look for cookbook approaches or subscribed to whatever promised the results desired in the quickest period of time. Small wonder, that often we find students unable to generalize what is learned beyond the required tests.

In deaf education particularly, students do not have time for unnecessary experimentation. They need learning experiences which provide the information required for integration within a hearing society.

To be useful, instruction must make sense. To make sense, it must be as organized as we can make it. The theory we choose is very important.

One such theory is Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Abilities. Basically, the taxonomy is designed to help teachers organize instruction around certain cognitive areas. These have been summarized in the appendix. Each portion of the taxonomy builds on the preceding area. For example, the student must possess knowledge to demonstrate comprehension of that knowledge. Comprehension of knowledge is required before such knowledge can be applied. A student can not analyze what is not comprehended nor synthesize what is newly learned with what has been learned previously without understanding that new knowledge. Finally, few students can determine the important information given without experience in the other areas of the taxonomy.

Thus, a teacher in deaf education, regardless of the subject matter or discipline, needs to make sure that goals and objectives as well as the learning activities connected with them are structured so that students receive more than surface information about a topic.

The Planning Web:

Another planning tool in curriculum development is the planning web. Each component allows the instructor

to offer students well-developed learning experiences. It too, supports the rule of simplicity because it helps teachers to build instructional outcomes on the basis of practical planning activities.

Classroom Management:

In this area, also we have tended to present to deaf educators a number of management techniques. Yet, we have not often explained how these can best be implemented nor their limitations as well as advantages.

Abuses of the Rule of Simplicity:

Consequently, we have indiscriminately applied classroom management techniques which often do not help the student to change his/her behavior only to temporarily alter it. We concentrate on short-term outcomes but rarely on assisting students to think about the consequences of behavior and understand the choice they have in determining those consequences. In short, though there are many classroom management theories, few are understood or applied correctly.

Dr. Max Webber at the University of Houston has developed a technique for handling management problems which is simple and applicable regardless of the theory of management selected: Dr. Webber's analytic pluralistic process consists of four stages in which the teacher:

1) specifies desirable classroom conditions
2) analyzes existing classroom conditions
3) selects and utilizes managerial strategies
4) assesses managerial effectiveness

Specifying Desirable Classroom Conditons:

Specifying desirable classroom conditions means the teacher identifies those conditions which will enable him/her to be most effective. These conditions are carefully considered and reflect the teacher's own philosophical view of management. Most importantly, whenever possible, these conditions are shared with the students.

Analysis of Existing Classroom Conditions:

Analysis of existing classroom conditions means the teacher compares the "real" situation with the "ideal" to determine discrepancies. Such an analysis allows the teacher to: (1) decide which of these discrepancies needs immediate attention, which require eventual attention, and which require monitoring; (2) identify potential problems - those most likely to arise if the teacher fails to take preventative measures; and (3) identify those existing conditions which the teacher wishes to maintain, encourage and sustain because they are desirable.

Selection and Utilization of Managerial Strategies:

When the teacher's analysis indicates that intervention is needed, he/she should carefully select and apply the managerial strategy or strategies which have the greatest potential for achieving the managerial objectives.

Webber terms this selection process a "computer search" in which the teacher considers strategies stored in his/her "computer bank" and selects the strategy or strategies with

which he/she is most comfortable philosophically and which promise to achieve the desired results.

Assessment of Managerial Effectiveness:

This is the stage of evaluation. Having utilized the strategy or strategies, the teacher should monitor his or her effectiveness. That is, according to Dr. Webber, the teacher should evaluate the extent to which students are behaving in desirable ways, the extent to which students are doing what they are supposed to be doing. In assessing managerial effectiveness, then, the teacher applies both process (teacher behavior) and product (student behavior) criteria.

In classroom management, the analytic-pluralistic approach translates well into practice and in so doing conforms to the rule of simplicity.

Language Development:

Regardless of the theory to which you subscribe, instruction in language should be related to concrete, generalizable experiences and examples. Language theory to be useful must explain a real problem or deficit that children have. The study of language itself is a complex science. Witness the amount of literature in the field. For educators in general and deaf educators in particular, the single most important criterion for selection of a language theory should be its ability to be implemented in the classroom. The theory should lead to the production of assessment instruments and instructional materials.

Further, neither the assessment instrument nor the instructional materials should be so complex that they frustrate the student.

Language theories to be useable should also allow for long-range planning, and the coordination of classroom objectives. Language should not be apart from other subjects, it should be part of those other subjects.

When assessing language, examine what the student knows as well as what is unknown. Build on those knowns while helping the student to learn the unknowns.

In language development, as in curriculum planning, and classroom management, a theory is only as useful as it is useable.

Before selecting any language teaching theory, activity or strategy ask the following questions:

1) Does the theory permit identification of the student's communication level--the level of student's functioning.
2) Does the theory permit you to write/re-write/ translate activities or select reading materials which remediate the problem(s) you've identified?
3) Does the theory permit you to organize learning experiences for the child in a systematic fashion? If the theory is more complex, obfuscating, and difficult to use than it is useful, promptly abandon it.

Conclusion:

The future of education requires the examination of many complex issues. Today's schools must provide instruction which is comprehensible and applicable. Deaf educators must focus their attention on providing clear, simple, learning to students. Hopefully, the information in this presentation will help you begin that task.